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ABSTRACT

A preliminary summary is presented of a national survey, entitled "What Works in Student Retention," conducted in spring 1979 by the American College Testing (ACT) Program and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. The purpose of the survey was to identify, analyze, and compile information about campus action programs and efforts for improving student retention in higher education. Of the 1,600 participating institutions, 879 returns were processed for this summary. Institutional data and other information not included on the questionnaire were retrieved from ACT Institutional Data Questionnaire files and matched with the survey returns. Tables are included on: retention and graduation information by type of institution; campus attrition/retention studies and analyses by type of institution; most important factors influencing student retention; negative campus characteristics by type of institution; dropout-prone characteristics by type of institution; information on campus organization for retention by type of institution; titles of retention coordinator and respondent, specific action programs by type of institution, target groups for retention strategies by type of institution; major action program categories by type of institution; success indexes of action programs by type of institution; and target groups and action programs by retention impact index and general impact index. A sample questionnaire and an outline of the contents of the final report on the survey are included. (SW)

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What Works in Student Retention

A Preliminary Summary of a National Survey
Conducted Jointly by
The American College Testing Program and the
National Center for Higher Education Management Systems

Philip E. Beal
Lee Noel

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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2

What Works in Student Retention

Philip E. Beal
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Table of Contents

Methodology 1
Findings 1
Conclusions 5
Recommendations 5
Tables 7
Appendix A. The WWISR Survey Instrument 23
Appendix B. Contents of the WWISR Final Report 31

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List of Tables

Table 1. Retention and Graduation by Type of Institution 7

Table 2. Campus Attrition/Retention Studies and Analyses by Type of Institution 8

Table 3. Most Important Factors Influencing Student Retention 9

Table 4. Negative Campus Characteristics by Type of Institution 10

Table 5. Positive Campus Characteristics by Type of Institution 11

Table 6. Dropout-prone Characteristics by Type of Institution 11

Tables 7-11. Campus Organization for Retention by Type of Institution

- Table 7. Retention Coordinator 12
- Table 8. Reporting Line of Coordinator 12
- Table 9. Initial Moving Forces behind Retention Efforts 13
- Table 10. Problems Encountered 14
- Table 11 Steering Committee 15

Table 12. Title of Retention Coordinator 16

Table 13. Title of Respondent 16

Table 14. Specific Action Programs by Type of Institution 17

Table 15. Target Groups for Retention Strategies by Type of Institution . 18

Table 16. Major Action Program Categories by Type of Institution 19

Table 17. Success Indexes of Action Programs by Type of Institution 20

Table 18. Target Groups by Retention Impact Index and General Impact Index 21

Table 19. Action Programs by Retention Impact Index and General Impact Index 22

What Works in Student Retention

A national survey, entitled "What Works in Student Retention" (WWISR), was conducted in spring 1979 by The American College Testing Program (ACT) and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS). The purpose of the survey was to identify, analyze, and compile information about campus action programs and efforts for improving student retention in higher education. This summary of the findings is being sent to all institutions that participated in the survey and to other selected persons and agencies. A more complete report, to be published jointly by ACT and NCHEMS, will be available as a monograph in early 1980. (The contents of this monograph are described on page 31.)

Methodology

A pilot instrument was constructed during winter 1978-79 and was reviewed by advisory boards from both ACT and NCHEMS. A draft of the survey instrument was field-tested by 20 institutions. A postcard survey was then sent to 2,459 institutions requesting the president of the institution to designate the individual who should receive and complete the questionnaire. Returns were received from 1,600 presidents, and questionnaires were sent accordingly. To date, 989 returns have been received, 879 of which were processed for this summary. Institutional data and other information not included on the questionnaire were retrieved from ACT Institutional Data Questionnaire files and matched with WWISR returns. Totals of less than 100 percent in the findings result from incomplete responses on the WWISR questionnaire or incomplete data from ACT institutional files.

Findings

Table 1 displays retention and graduation information by type of institution. The one-year figures represent the number and percentage of students who matriculated in specific years and who were still enrolled in the same institution after one year; the two-year figures represent students still enrolled in the same institution after two years. Graduation figures represent students still enrolled after three or

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Note. The chief consultant to the project was Dr. Robert G. Cope, Professor of Higher Education, University of Washington, and coauthor of *Revolving College Doors*.

five years. The highest retention rates were found in four-year private nonsectarian institutions, and the lowest in two-year public institutions. The admissions selectivity of the institution had a direct bearing on retention: highly selective institutions showed the highest retention, and open-admissions institutions showed the lowest. The figures for graduation in five years indicate a somewhat higher rate of graduation than is typically found in the literature. Four-year sectarian institutions showed a somewhat lower graduation rate than four-year nonsectarian institutions.

Table 2 indicates campus attrition/retention studies and analyses by type of institution. Four-year institutions were somewhat more likely to have conducted studies than two-year institutions, and were also more likely to have a study currently under way. Seventy-five percent of the four-year private schools had administered surveys as part of their studies; other types of schools showed smaller percentages. One-half of the schools responding indicated that they had surveyed dropouts; somewhat less than half had surveyed current students.

Table 3 summarizes the respondents' evaluation of the most important factors that influence student retention. Tables 4, 5, and 6 display the most important factors by type of institution. Tables 3-6 present average ratings, where respondents indicated on a scale of one to five the degree of importance of each item. (One is low; five is high.) Different types of institutions identified negative campus characteristics differently. "Conflict between classes and job" was most important in two-year public schools. "Inadequate academic advising" was most important in four-year public schools, and less important in two-year private schools than in other types. Positive campus characteristics seemed to vary less widely: "caring attitude of faculty and staff" was considered "most important" in all four types of institutions. For dropout-prone characteristics, respondents were almost unanimous in assigning relative importance to each item. "Low academic achievement" and "limited educational aspirations" were the two most important characteristics. But "indecision about major/career goal" was perceived as less important in four-year private schools than in other types.

Tables 7-11 show the organization of campus retention efforts by type of institution. A majority of the schools, ranging from 70 percent of the two-year public schools to 48 percent of the four-year private schools, indicated that no one was assigned specific retention coordination responsibility on their campuses. The percentage of existing coordinators who reported to the president varied greatly: 73 percent reported to the president in two-year private schools, but only 22 percent reported to the president in four-year public schools. The next most frequent reporting line was to the academic vice president; the third most frequent line was to the student affairs vice president. Fewer than one-third of the schools had a steering committee for student retention, although four-year schools were somewhat more likely to have steering committees than two-year schools. The most likely members of steering committees were faculty, followed by student affairs administrators, academic affairs administrators, and general administrators. Fifty-two percent of the steering committees included students. The initial moving force behind the retention efforts was the president in 48 percent of the schools, followed by student affairs vice presidents (34 percent), academic vice presidents (33 percent), and admissions offices (30 percent). The major problems

encountered were insufficient time, data, staff, and funds. Less important problems also appear in table 10.

Table 12 presents the titles of retention coordinators reported by the respondents. Over 70 different titles were reported; the majority of these are combined to form the headings in the table. Of the respondents who reported titles, 20 percent indicated that the dean of students carried retention coordination responsibility. Other officials who bear this responsibility included various persons in academic administration, directors of admissions, and student affairs staff. As noted in table 13, respondents to the survey were most likely to be deans of students or academic administrators. In 11 percent of the returns, the respondent was a director or assistant in the office of institutional research. Many other titles were indicated, the majority of which are included in the table.

Information about action programs was solicited in two ways in the survey. In one section, respondents were given a list of institutional services and were asked to check those action programs, i.e., new or modified services or curricular offerings, which had been restructured or introduced on their campuses in a specific effort to improve retention. Table 14 presents the action programs checked by the institutions in rank order. Improvement of academic advising was most frequently cited (52 percent), followed by special orientation activities (50 percent), and exit interviews (40 percent). As indicated, 17 percent checked "*no* special action programs for student retention."

Information about action programs was solicited by including a retention activity report form on which the respondent was asked to describe each type of campus program and its impact on student retention. (See the copy of the survey reproduced in the Appendix for an example of this form.) Nine hundred thirty-eight forms were received from 387 institutions. About 40 different target groups were identified as receiving special attention through action programs. These groups were placed into 14 categories, as listed in table 15. "New students," including both freshmen and transfers, was the target group most often identified, followed by "all students" and "high-risk students." Of the action programs, 10 percent were directed to students with low academic performance or other potential dropout indicators. A miscellaneous category also represented 10 percent of the target group. While the target group of minority students was specifically cited by only 2 percent of the respondents, many others included minority students with high-risk students or other groups.

Various differences by type of institution were noted. Two-year private schools emphasized new students and high-risk students, while two-year public and four-year private schools were more likely than other institutions to address potential dropouts.

Table 16 divides the action programs conducted by the responding institutions into major categories. The most frequently offered programs dealt with learning skills and academic support systems: 24 percent of the institutions engaged in these types of programs. The next most common action programs were "academic advising and orientation," followed by "early warning systems." Again, some differences by type of institution were noted. Fewer four-year private schools

conducted programs in learning/academic support systems, and fewer four-year public institutions conducted early warning systems.

When coding action forms, staff noted differences in the ways respondents rated their satisfaction and retention estimates. Some respondents were reluctant to rate highly a program that had only recently been initiated, while other respondents rated a given program highly on potential rather than on experience. For those and other reasons, a general-impact index and a retention-impact index were devised. In each, the index ranged from one to five, with five indicating superior impact. In the retention index, five or superior indicated a stated improvement in retention of 10 or more percentage points from the previous date of analysis. Thus if 55 percent of a target group reenrolled for a second year prior to a new program, and 65 percent enrolled for a second year after the intervention program was initiated, the program was given a retention-impact index of five. Three graduate students with experience in content analysis and coding read all the action forms and assigned success indexes to the programs.

Table 17 presents average ratings according to several success indexes. On a scale of one to five, the average satisfaction with programs was 3.90 for all types of institutions, with four-year private schools somewhat more satisfied than others. For estimated impact on retention, four-year public schools were the most optimistic. For general impact, the returns were similar for three types of institutions, with the lowest impact occurring at two-year public schools.

On the retention-impact index, the two-year private schools showed the highest apparent success, followed by four-year public schools, four-year private schools, and two-year public schools.

The impact of action programs on various target groups is noted in table 18. The table includes only those programs rated as showing impact on a range of two to five. For retention improvement, the target groups that benefited most from intervention programs were resident students, dropouts, high-risk students, new students, and participants in programs directed at multiple target groups. For all target groups, varying degrees of retention improvement occurred.

In terms of general campus impact, the efforts that yielded the greatest benefits were those directed at resident students, minority students, others, women and adults, and multiple target groups. Again, varying degrees of positive campus impact occurred with all the target groups.

The impact of action programs in general and on retention *per se* is illustrated in table 19. Program emphasis on new policies and structures for retention yielded the greatest improvement in retention, followed by new learning and academic support programs, early warning systems, orientation programs, and curricular developments. Although programs emphasizing student-peer involvement ranked low in retention improvement, they ranked first in general campus impact. In several other programs, including career assistance programs and faculty/staff development, the campus impact appeared considerably greater than the retention impact. Exit interviews ranked low on both general campus impact and retention impact.

Conclusions

1. Retention rates for all types of institutions show that two-thirds of entering freshmen return as sophomores. The rates are highest for four-year private nondenominational schools and lowest for two-year public schools.
2. Retention rates show a negative trend for two-year public, four-year public, and four-year private sectarian schools.
3. One third or more of responding institutions have not conducted campus studies related to their own attrition/retention. In the opinion of the authors, more of these institutions should do so. More institutions should also include dropout studies in the analysis of their attrition/retention.
4. The most important factors in student retention clearly reveal the campus-wide nature of the issue. Curricular offerings, student-faculty contact, support services, and attitudes of faculty and staff all affect student retention.
5. Organization for retention is likely to result in strategies for improving retention. More campuses should formally organize for retention.
6. The forces that can initiate retention efforts are varied, and no single area of administration can claim to know the best way for efforts to proceed. More cooperation among administrative areas would probably be desirable.
7. Lack of time, data, staff, and funds are the top four problems encountered in retention efforts. Nevertheless, many action programs succeed despite those problems. In fact, many programs appear to cost very little, for they use the competencies of existing staff.
8. The role of the dean of students is greater than that of other positions in coordinating retention efforts and in responding to the survey instrument. However, many other positions are represented in these activities. Campus acceptance of the responsible position or office is probably the key.
9. Action programs most likely to be a benefit to retention and to the campus include those that involve orientation, advising, learning and academic support, and counseling, and use multiple approaches directed toward target groups including high-risk students, minority students, skill-deficient students, and potential dropouts.
10. Each type of action program included one or more examples with a high retention impact and/or a high general impact.

Recommendations

Even a brief analysis of the WWISR findings suggests a few minimal steps that institutions should take to improve student retention:

1. Organize itself for student retention
2. Study and analyze its own institutional data
3. Identify and implement action programs aimed at specific target groups appropriate to its campus.

Elaborations of these and other specific recommendations will appear in the monograph to be issued in early 1980.

TABLE 1

Retention and Graduation
by Type of Institution
(By Number and Percentage)

Institution	Retention after 1 Year					
	1975-76		1976-77		1977-1978	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
2-Year Public	74	55	82	55	92	53
2-Year Private	27	63	29	64	30	63
Nonsectarian	12	63	12	62	12	64
Religious	15	61	17	65	18	62
4-Year Public	99	68	103	67	104	66
4-Year Private	207	71	222	71	227	71
Nonsectarian	66	73	72	73	76	74
Religious	141	71	150	70	151	68

	Retention after 2 Years				Graduation			
	1975-77		1976-78		3 years		5 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2-Year Public					188	41		
2-Year Private					46	61		
Nonsectarian					18	63		
Religious					28	60		
4-Year Public	85	56	78	55			135	53
4-Year Private	176	57	178	57			306	60
Nonsectarian	52	63	55	63			105	64
Religious	124	55	123	54			201	58

TABLE 2

Campus Attrition/Retention Studies and Analyses by Type of Institution
(In Percentages)

Campus Study	N =	2-Year Public	2-Year Private	4-Year Public	4-Year Private	Total
		255	52	201	350	858
Have conducted study		46	52	67	64	58
Now conducting study		29	31	41	34	34
Plan to conduct study		23	21	22	20	21
Need study but have none		22	23	15	15	18
No study and no plans		2	6	0	2	2
Have surveyed groups		55	54	66	75	62
Survey includes:						
Dropouts		53	35	53	48	50
Current Students		41	44	48	51	47
Alumni		17	19	12	12	14
Prospective Students		9	12	15	15	13
Reenrollers		13	8	11	11	12
Faculty		6	10	6	11	8
Administrators		6	12	7	10	8
Others		8	4	7	5	6
Staff		4	10	4	8	5

TABLE 3

Most Important Factors Influencing Student Retention
(In Rank Order)

Campus Characteristic	Average Rating
Negative	
Inadequate academic advising	3.01
Inadequate curricular offerings	2.80
Conflict between class schedule and job	2.77
Inadequate financial aid	2.66
Inadequate counseling support system	2.58
Inadequate extracurricular offerings	2.58
Positive	
Caring attitude of faculty and staff	4.28
High quality of teaching	3.91
Adequate financial aid	3.66
Student involvement in campus life	3.30
High quality of advising	3.23
Dropout-prone	
Low academic achievement	4.46
Limited educational aspirations	4.09
Indecision about major/career goal	3.93
Inadequate financial resources	3.64

Note: Figures are average ratings given by respondents on a scale of one (low) to five (high).

TABLE 4

Negative Campus Characteristics by Type of Institution

Negative Characteristic	N =	2-Year Public 255	2-Year Private 52	4-Year Public 201	4-Year Private 350	Total 858
Inadequate academic advising		2.87	2.33	3.61	2.90	3.01
Inadequate curricular offerings		2.65	2.56	2.90	2.93	2.80
Conflict between class/job		3.78	2.12	2.86	2.08	2.77
Inadequate financial aid		2.40	2.50	2.64	2.91	2.66
Inadequate counseling support system		2.53	2.29	2.76	2.56	2.58
Inadequate extracurricular programs		2.47	2.86	2.31	2.78	2.58
Inadequate academic support services		2.40	2.10	2.80	2.52	2.52
Inadequate cultural/social growth		2.42	2.14	2.52	2.61	2.51
Inadequate career planning services		2.58	2.20	2.74	2.34	2.48
Inadequate student-faculty contact		2.37	1.60	3.01	2.06	2.33
Insufficient intellectual challenge		2.35	2.06	2.42	2.27	2.31
Lack of faculty care and concern		2.30	1.58	2.86	2.01	2.26
Inadequate part-time employment		2.37	2.08	2.49	2.11	2.26
Unsatisfactory living accommodations		2.04	2.28	2.24	2.40	2.25
Low quality of teaching		2.21	2.00	2.45	2.10	2.21
Lack of staff care and concern		2.24	1.69	2.50	2.07	2.20
Restrictive rules and regulations		1.38	2.63	1.58	2.08	1.79

Note. Figures are average ratings given by respondents on a scale of one (low) to five (high).

TABLE 5

Positive Campus Characteristics by Type of Institution

Positive Characteristic	N =	2-Year Public 255	2-Year Private 52	4-Year Public 201	4-Year Private 350	Total 858
Caring attitude of faculty and staff		4.30	4.52	4.00	4.38	4.28
High quality of teaching		4.03	2.67	3.72	3.94	3.91
Adequate financial aid		3.79	3.56	3.77	3.51	3.66
Student involvement in campus		3.03	3.46	3.46	3.44	3.30
High quality of advising		3.46	3.30	3.19	3.09	3.23
Excellent counseling services		3.56	3.06	3.18	2.94	3.19
Excellent career-planning services		3.37	2.80	3.21	2.99	3.14
Concern for student/institutional fit		2.88	3.36	3.01	3.30	3.11
Admissions geared to graduation		2.54	3.19	3.06	3.14	2.96
Early alert system		2.75	2.90	3.70	2.61	2.70

Note. Figures are average ratings given by respondents on a scale of one (low) to five (high).

TABLE 6

Dropout-prone Characteristics by Type of Institution

Dropout-prone Characteristic	N =	2-Year Public 255	2-Year Private 52	4-Year Public 201	4-Year Private 350	Total 858
Low academic achievement		4.46	4.41	4.45	4.48	4.46
Limited educational aspirations		4.16	4.10	4.16	4.02	4.09
Indecision about major/career goal		3.99	3.63	3.95	2.94	3.93
Inadequate financial resources		3.57	3.55	3.53	3.79	3.64
Economically disadvantaged		3.41	2.84	3.29	3.07	3.21
First-generation student		2.70	2.78	2.63	2.33	2.54
Commuter		2.28	1.98	2.63	2.45	2.40

Note. Figures are average ratings given by respondents on a scale of one (low) to five (high).

TABLES 7-11

Campus Organization for Retention
by Type of Institution
(In Percentages)

TABLE 7

Retention Coordinator

Retention Coordinator	N =	2-Year Public 255	2-Year Private 52	4-Year Public 201	4-Year Private 350	Total 858
No one assigned		70	65	66	48	58
One existing staff assigned		17	21	18	34	24
Existing staff from several areas		11	14	12	14	12
New position created		2	0	5	5	3

TABLE 8

Reporting Line of Coordinator

Reporting Line of Coordinator	N =	2-Year Public 74	2-Year Private 15	4-Year Public 59	4-Year Private 175	Total 329
President		49	73	22	43	43
Academic vice president		12	7	34	27	24
Student affairs vice president		15	0	22	14	15
Other		12	7	15	14	14
Director of admissions		5	13	0	1	2
Director of counseling		5	0	2	1	1
Registrar		1	0	2	1	1
Director of institutional research		0	0	3	0	1

TABLE 9

Initial Moving Forces behind Retention Efforts

Initial Force behind Efforts [a]	N =	2-Year Public 255	2-Year Private 52	4-Year Public 201	4-Year Private 350	Total 858
President		42	62	42	55	48
Vice president for student affairs		39	27	32	33	34
Vice president for academic affairs		22	35	37	39	33
Admissions		24	5	27	34	30
Counseling services		34	27	25	14	23
Faculty		18	23	13	17	17
Registrar		9	25	15	18	15
Other		8	8	21	13	13
Other student services		9	2	12	7	9
Board of trustees		7	12	4	7	7
Academic departments		9	8	6	4	6
Financial aid		6	15	3	6	6
Career planning and placement		7	2	4	4	5
Federal statistics requirements		3	4	5	4	4
External stimulus		3	2	3	6	4
Vice president for business		2	6	2	5	3
Alumni		0	1	1	1	1

[a] Respondents could check more than one.

TABLE 10

Problems Encountered

Problem[a]	N =	2-Year Public 255	2-Year Private 52	4-Year Public 201	4-Year Private 250	Total 858
Lack of time		62	62	46	62	59
Insufficient data		52	48	53	51	51
Lack of staff		51	58	49	51	51
Lack of funds		38	35	37	33	36
Inadequate data processing capability		27	27	23	33	29
Inadequate measurement evaluation skills		27	37	14	27	25
Inadequate measurement instruments		25	40	20	27	25
Lack of faculty support		25	17	21	16	20
Resistance to new roles/responsibilities		25	25	21	15	20
Other		16	15	24	21	20
Lack of support from administration		15	4	12	11	12
Resistance to policy changes		13	13	11	13	12

[a]Respondents could check more than one.

TABLE 11

Steering Committee
(Membership by Average Number of Representatives and Percent)

	2-Year Public		2-Year Private		4-Year Public		4-Year Private		Total	
Presence of a Steering Committee [a] N =	255		52		201		350		858	
	26		19		35		35		31	
	R	%	R	%	R	%	R	%	R	%
Faculty	2.8	95	1.8	90	3.3	87	2.4	86	2.7	88
Student affairs administrators	1.8	70	1.0	70	1.9	93	1.6	85	1.7	85
Academic administrators	1.4	58	1.0	60	1.5	85	1.4	71	1.4	71
General administrators	1.4	64	1.2	50	1.8	67	1.4	65	1.5	64
Students	1.5	53	2.0	40	2.0	52	2.0	52	1.9	52
Support staff	1.3	32	1.0	20	1.4	10	1.4	23	1.4	22
Other	1.1	15	1.0	10	1.6	19	1.0	10	1.2	14

Note. Some columns do not total 100% due to rounding.

[a]Respondents could check more than one.

TABLE 12

Title of Retention Coordinator

Title	Percentage
Dean of students	20
Academic administrator	14
Director of admissions	12
Student affairs staff	10
Director of counseling or a counselor	8
Director of institutional research or assistant	5
Academic vice president	5
Director of retention	5
Registrar	4
Student affairs vice president	3
Coordinator of advising	3
Other or no response	11

TABLE 13

Title of Respondent

Title	Percentage
Dean of students	17
Academic administrator	17
Director of institutional research or assistant	11
Director of counseling or a counselor	7
Student affairs staff	7
Registrar	5
Academic vice president	5
Student affairs vice president	4
Coordinator for advising	2
Director of admissions	2
Director for retention	2
Other or no response	21

TABLE 14

Specific Action Programs by Type of Institution
(Reported in Percentages)

Action Program	N =	2-Year Public 255	2-Year Private 52	4-Year Public 201	4-Year Private 350	Total 858
Improvement of academic advising		47	54	56	55	52
Special orientation activities		49	50	53	50	50
Exit interviews		27	38	35	52	40
Special counseling programs		31	37	41	34	35
Early warning system		25	37	26	44	34
New academic support/learning services		29	31	38	31	32
Students as peer advisers and counselors		23	21	34	33	30
Curricular innovations for credit		27	27	32	30	29
Expanded placement services		21	13	23	30	24
New extracurricular activities		15	21	14	25	19
Undeclared major services		11	0	32	17	18
Faculty/instructional development		20	17	16	16	18
Admissions for student-institutional fit		13	12	17	17	16
Use of students in institutional decisions		13	14	16	17	16
New noncredit course offerings		21	17	18	10	15
Job-related training programs		15	8	13	16	15
New administrative structures		10	8	20	13	14
Adult student services		17	8	16	10	14
Advising in promotion and tenure		3	4	10	8	7
No special action programs		23	17	14	15	17

TABLE 15

Target Groups for Retention Strategies by Type of Institution
(In Percentages)

Target Group	N =	2-Year Public 230	2-Year Private 32	4-Year Public 281	4-Year Private 370	Total 913
New students		16	25	17	26	21
All students		15	6	10	18	14
High risk		8	28	17	6	11
Low academic performance		10	12	12	8	10
Potential dropouts		12	6	4	13	10
Other		12	3	11	7	10
Undecided majors and careers		4	0	8	4	5
Skill deficiency		6	0	4	4	4
Faculty and staff		4	3	4	4	4
Women and adults		6	3	3	1	3
Multiple targets		3	3	5	3	3
Minority students		1	0	4	2	2
Dropouts		4	0	1	2	2
Resident students		0	9	1	1	1

TABLE 16

Major Action Program Categories by Type of Institution
(In Percentages)

Action Program Category	N =	2-Year Public 230	2-Year Private 32	4-Year Public 281	4-Year Private 320	Total 863
Learning and academic support		22	28	33	18	24
Advising		12	16	17	11	13
Orientation		12	19	13	13	13
Early warning systems		14	16	6	16	12
Career assistance		4	0	6	6	6
Counseling		5	0	3	5	4
Peer programs		4	3	4	5	4
New policies, structures		4	3	1	5	4
Other		4	0	4	4	4
Exit interviews		4	0	3	3	3
Faculty-staff development		4	3	1	3	3
Multiple action programs		4	3	3	3	3
Dropout studies		4	0	1	2	2
Cocurricular activities		1	3	2	4	2
Curricular developments		2	6	2	2	2

TABLE 17

Success Indexes of Action Programs by Type of Institution

Success Index	N =	2-Year Public 230	2-Year Private 32	4-Year Public 281	4-Year Private 371	Total 913
Satisfaction with program		3.86	3.68	3.88	3.94	3.90
Retention estimate		3.53	3.39	3.62	3.45	3.53
General impact						
All programs		3.00	3.25	3.19	3.23	3.18
Programs rated 2 or higher		3.71	3.78	3.85	3.77	3.79
Retention impact						
All programs		1.80	2.03	1.96	1.88	1.91
Programs rated 2 or higher		3.10	3.54	3.38	3.26	3.28

Note. Figures are averages of ratings made on a scale of one (low) to five (high).

TABLE 18

Target Groups by
Retention Impact Index and General Impact Index

Target Group	Retention Index N		Rank	General Index N		Rank
Resident students	4	3.50	1	10	4.40	1
Dropouts	6	3.50	2	14	3.36	14
High risk	53	3.45	3	78	3.83	7
Multiple target groups	13	3.46	4	31	3.94	5
New students	90	3.33	5.5	167	3.84	6
Other	46	3.33	5.5	81	4.04	3
Women and adults	8	3.25	7	23	4.00	4
Skill deficiencies	17	3.24	8.5	37	3.76	8.5
All students	46	3.24	8.5	108	3.76	8.5
Minority students	11	3.18	10	20	4.05	2
Undecided majors and careers	13	3.15	11	34	3.68	11
Low academic performance	38	3.13	12	68	3.57	12
Potential dropouts	41	3.07	13	63	3.49	13
Faculty and staff	8	3.00	14	31	3.65	10
All	393	3.28		770	3.79	

Note. Range of indexes: 2-5.

TABLE 19

Action Programs by Retention Impact Index and General Impact Index

Action Program	Retention Index N		Rank	General Index N		Rank
New policies, structures	10	3.50	1	24	3.88	7.5
Learning, academic support	109	3.39	2	192	3.81	9
Early warning systems	42	3.36	3	92	3.52	13
Orientation	63	3.33	4.5	113	3.89	6
Curricular developments	6	3.33	4.5	13	3.92	4
Career assistance	21	3.29	6.5	44	4.00	2.5
Multiple action programs	14	3.29	6.5	24	4.00	2.5
Advising	55	3.22	9.5	105	2.74	11
Counseling	18	3.22	9.5	30	3.80	10
Faculty/staff development	9	3.22	9.5	22	3.91	5
Peer programs	9	3.22	9.5	31	4.13	1
Other	12	3.00	12	32	3.88	7.5
Dropout studies	6	2.83	13	10	3.20	15
Cocurricular activities	4	2.75	14	19	3.63	12
Exit interviews	15	2.67	15	22	3.23	14
All	393	3.28		770	3.79	

Note: Range of indexes: 2-5.

Appendix A
The WWISR Survey Instrument

The American College Testing Program
P.O. Box 168
Iowa City, Iowa 52243

National Center for Higher Education
Management Systems
P.O. Drawer P
Boulder, Colo. 80302

WWISR

What Works in Student Retention?

Most colleges and universities are concerned with the problem of student attrition and retention. We have sent this questionnaire to you because your president has designated you as the person best able to help us identify action programs underway on your campus to improve student retention. We will treat all responses confidentially.

A promise was made to your president that a summary of our nationwide study would be sent to each institution that completes this questionnaire.

Your name _____

Title _____

Institution _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____
area code

PART A

YOUR CAMPUS AND THE GENERAL PROBLEM

An important goal of this project is to determine the nature and extent of student withdrawals during the early years of college.

1. What percentage of your full-time entering freshmen are on the average not enrolled one year later?

1 ___ 0-5%
2 ___ 6-10%
3 ___ 11-15%
4 ___ 16-20%
5 ___ 21-25%
6 ___ 26-30%
7 ___ 31-35%
8 ___ 36-40%
9 ___ 41-45%
10 ___ 46-50%
11 ___ 51-55%
12 ___ 56-60%
13 ___ 61-65%
14 ___ 66-70%
15 ___ 71-75%
16 ___ 76% or more

2. The above response is based on: *Check one.*

1 ___ Actual data
2 ___ Estimates

3. If you have enrollment and retention data readily available, provide the figures for the years indicated.

	1975	1976	1977	1978
Number of new freshmen (full-time only)	1	1	1	1
Percent of above freshman students enrolled 1 year later	2	2	2	2
Four-year institutions only: Percent of above freshman students enrolled 2 years later	3	3	3	3
Total number of full-time students	4	4	4	4

4. The above responses are based on: *Check one.*

1 ___ Actual data
2 ___ Estimates

PART B

ANALYSIS ON YOUR CAMPUS

Many colleges have collected attrition and retention data for a number of years; others have also conducted systematic analytical studies of the subject. In this section, we would like to know whether your institution has engaged in such studies. (We are also asking you to rate the importance you attribute to indicators of attrition, indicators of retention, and characteristics of dropout prone students on your campus.)

5. Which of the following describe(s) your institution? *Check all that apply.*

1 ___ We have conducted one or more analytical studies of attrition and retention.
2 ___ We are now conducting such a study.
3 ___ We are planning to conduct such a study.
4 ___ We see the need for a study, but have not acted on it.
5 ___ We have not conducted such a study and have no plans to do so.

6. Has your analytical study included a survey of one or more groups?

1 ___ Yes
2 ___ No. *Go to question 8.*

7. Which of the following groups did (or will) you survey? *Check all that apply; then go to question 9.*

1 ___ Prospective students
2 ___ Current students
3 ___ Former students who did not graduate
4 ___ Reenrollers (stopouts who have reenrolled)
5 ___ Alumni
6 ___ Faculty
7 ___ Administrators
8 ___ Staff
9 ___ Others (Specify _____)

8. Why didn't you include a survey in your study? *Check all that apply.*

1 ___ Did not think a survey would provide helpful information
2 ___ Could not locate suitable instruments
3 ___ Too expensive
4 ___ Available instruments not flexible enough
5 ___ Insufficient time to prepare and administer the survey
6 ___ Staff unavailable to prepare and administer the survey
7 ___ Local staff unable to develop a suitable instrument
8 ___ Difficulties in identifying an appropriate sample
9 ___ Difficulties associated with scoring and analyzing data
10 ___ Other (Specify _____)

9. Previous research has linked attrition to certain *negative* campus characteristics. (Attrition here refers to students leaving the institution before graduation and not returning for additional study.) Commonly mentioned negative characteristics are listed below. Rate *each* of them in importance to attrition on your campus by circling the appropriate number. Scale: 1—low importance to 5—high importance.

	Importance Low				High
1. Lack of faculty care and concern for students	1	2	3	4	5
2. Lack of staff care and concern for students	1	2	3	4	5
3. Quality of teaching not consistently high	1	2	3	4	5
4. Inadequate academic advising	1	2	3	4	5
5. Inadequate counseling support system	1	2	3	4	5
6. Inadequate academic support services, learning centers, and similar resources	1	2	3	4	5
7. Inadequate financial aid	1	2	3	4	5
8. Inadequate part-time employment opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
9. Inadequate career planning services	1	2	3	4	5
10. Inadequate extracurricular programs	1	2	3	4	5
11. Inadequate curricular offerings	1	2	3	4	5
12. Restrictive rules and regulations governing student behavior	1	2	3	4	5
13. Unsatisfactory living accommodations	1	2	3	4	5
14. Inadequate personal contact between students and faculty	1	2	3	4	5
15. Inadequate opportunity for cultural and social growth	1	2	3	4	5
16. Insufficient intellectual stimulation or challenge	1	2	3	4	5
17. Conflict between class schedule and job	1	2	3	4	5
Other characteristics you consider important:					
18. _____	1	2	3	4	5
19. _____	1	2	3	4	5
20. _____	1	2	3	4	5

10. From the characteristics you rated "important" (4 or 5), select and rank up to five that you consider to be most important. Enter their numbers below.

1 ___ Most important
2 ___ Second most important
3 ___ Third most important
4 ___ Fourth most important
5 ___ Fifth most important

11. The *positive* characteristics of a campus may contribute directly to retention. Commonly mentioned positive characteristics are listed below. Rate *each* of them in importance to retention on your campus by circling the appropriate number. Scale: 1—low importance to 5—high importance.

	Importance Low				High
1. Caring attitude of faculty and staff	1	2	3	4	5
2. Consistent high quality of teaching	1	2	3	4	5
3. Consistent high quality of academic advising	1	2	3	4	5
4. Adequate financial aid programs	1	2	3	4	5
5. Admissions practices geared to recruiting students likely to persist to graduation	1	2	3	4	5
6. Overall concern for student-institutional congruence or "fit"	1	2	3	4	5
7. Excellent counseling services	1	2	3	4	5
8. Excellent career planning services	1	2	3	4	5
9. System for identifying potential dropouts (early alert system)	1	2	3	4	5
10. Encouragement of student involvement in campus life	1	2	3	4	5
Other characteristics you consider important:					
11. _____	1	2	3	4	5
12. _____	1	2	3	4	5
13. _____	1	2	3	4	5

12. From the characteristics you rated "important" (4 or 5), select and rank up to five that you consider to be most important. Enter their numbers below.

1 ___ Most important
2 ___ Second most important
3 ___ Third most important
4 ___ Fourth most important
5 ___ Fifth most important

13. Some schools have attempted to identify students considered to be "dropout prone." Drawing on your experience on your campus, rate *each* of the following student characteristics in terms of the relationship each bears to a student's likelihood of dropping out. Circle the appropriate number. Scale: 1—low potential for dropping out to 5—high potential for dropping out.

	Relationship to dropout potential Low High
1. Low academic achievement	1 2 3 4 5
2. Limited educational aspirations	1 2 3 4 5
3. First-generation college student	1 2 3 4 5
4. Commuter	1 2 3 4 5
5. Economically disadvantaged status	1 2 3 4 5
6. Indecision about major or career goal	1 2 3 4 5
7. Inadequate financial resources	1 2 3 4 5
Other characteristics you consider important	
8. _____	1 2 3 4 5
9. _____	1 2 3 4 5
10. _____	1 2 3 4 5

14. From the characteristics which you rated as having a "high relationship to dropout potential" (4 or 5), select and rank up to five that you consider to be highest in dropout potential. Enter their numbers below.

1 ___ Most important
2 ___ Second most important
3 ___ Third most important
4 ___ Fourth most important
5 ___ Fifth most important

PART C

CAMPUS ORGANIZATION FOR RETENTION

The degree to which a campus is organized to deal with student retention probably helps determine the success of retention efforts. In this section, we are interested in learning how your campus has addressed the issue of organization.

15. Please indicate whether your college has assigned a specific individual to coordinate overall retention activities.

1 ___ No one assigned. *Go to question 17.*
2 ___ One existing staff assigned (Position/Title _____)
  a ___ Released time (Percentage of full-time position: _____)
  b ___ Overload (added to previous responsibility)
3 ___ Existing staff from several areas assigned
  a ___ Released time (Percentage of full-time position: _____)
  b ___ Overload (added to previous responsibility)
4 ___ New position created (Title _____)
  a ___ Part time
  b ___ Full time

16. To whom does the retention coordinator report?

1 ___ We have no coordinator
2 ___ President
3 ___ Academic Vice President (Provost)
4 ___ Student Affairs Vice President
5 ___ Registrar
6 ___ Director of Institutional Research
7 ___ Director of Counseling
8 ___ Director of Admissions
9 ___ Specify _____)

17. Have you had a retention steering committee?

1 ___ No *Go to question 19.*
2 ___ Yes

18. Who has served on your steering committee: *Indicate the number serving from each of the following categories.*

1 ___ Faculty
2 ___ Students
3 ___ Administration—General
4 ___ Administration—Academic Affairs
5 ___ Administration—Student Affairs
6 ___ Support service staff (that is food service, library, housekeeping, secretarial staff, and so forth)
7 ___ Other (Specify _____)

19. Who was the initial moving force behind your retention efforts? *Check all that apply.*

1 ___ Board of Trustees
2 ___ President
3 ___ Vice President for Business
4 ___ Vice President for Academic Affairs
5 ___ Vice President for Student Affairs
6 ___ Faculty
7 ___ Admissions
8 ___ Registrar
9 ___ Academic departments
10 ___ Counseling services
11 ___ Alumni
12 ___ Financial aids
13 ___ Career planning and placement
14 ___ Federal statistical or reporting requirements
15 ___ Other student services (Specify _____)
16 ___ External stimulus (Specify _____)
17 ___ Other (Specify _____)

PART D

EVALUATION

Your answers to the following questions may help others anticipate and avoid some of the problems that plague retention efforts.

20. Which of the following problems did your retention efforts encounter? *Check all that apply.*

1 ___ Lack of funds
2 ___ Lack of staff
3 ___ Lack of time
4 ___ Lack of support from faculty
5 ___ Lack of support from administration
6 ___ Actual resistance to policy changes
7 ___ Actual resistance to acceptance of new roles or responsibilities
8 ___ Insufficient data
9 ___ Inadequate measurement—evaluation expertise
10 ___ Inadequate measurement instruments
11 ___ Inadequate data-processing capabilities

Other problems you encountered:

12 ___ _____
13 ___ _____
14 ___ _____

21. From the above list, select up to five *major* problems. Enter their numbers below and explain the problems in some detail.

1 ___ _____
_____
_____

2 ___ _____
_____
_____

3 ___ _____
_____
_____

4 ___ _____
_____
_____

5 ___ _____
_____
_____

22. To help us analyze your responses, please describe unique conditions at your institution that may positively or negatively affect student retention.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

PART E

ACTION PROGRAMS

The questions in Part E get at the heart of our survey. We are looking for examples of action programs that have been implemented on campus to improve student retention. We want to know what is happening even if a program has not been totally successful.

23. Other than analytical studies of attrition and retention, what specific attempts has your campus made to provide action programs—new or modified services or curricular offerings—to improve retention on your campus? *Check only those activities that have been restructured or introduced in a specific effort to improve retention.*

1 ___ No special action program
2 ___ Special orientation activities
3 ___ Improvement or redevelopment of academic advising program
4 ___ Curricular innovations in credit programs
5 ___ New noncredit course offerings
6 ___ Establishment of early warning systems for identifying and communicating with potential dropouts or stopouts
7 ___ Special counseling programs
8 ___ New administrative structures
9 ___ New or revitalized extracurricular activities
10 ___ Expanded academic support/enrichment learning services
11 ___ Special or required services for students who have not declared a major
12 ___ Expanded placement services
13 ___ Job-related training programs
14 ___ Faculty/instructional development programs
15 ___ Formal inclusion of advising effectiveness in faculty promotion and tenure decisions
16 ___ Special admissions materials and procedures designed to improve student-institutional "fit"
17 ___ Exit interviews conducted
18 ___ Use of students as peer advisers and counselors
19 ___ Involvement of students in administration, curricular design, other traditionally "nonstudent" activities
20 ___ Special and significant services designed to retain adult learners
Other attempts to improve retention:
21 ___ _____
22 ___ _____
23 ___ _____

The information you provide in the next item will be crucial to our project. Using the form provided, please list and describe specific action programs and activities your institution has initiated to improve student retention. Some definitions are provided to assist you. Please use a separate form for each activity or program. (Make extra copies of the form if necessary.) A sample form is provided for illustrative purposes.

24. Please type your responses. If you give permission, photocopies of your responses may be incorporated into a monograph or otherwise be made available to others. Be certain to include those campus action programs, activities, or models that may be of widespread interest. We hope to highlight these efforts nationally.

Definitions:

Target Group. The student group for whom a particular action program was designed. The group(s) to which a program was applied; for example, all freshmen, commuters, full-time minority students, high-risk students, undeclared majors. If there is more than one target group, please list each one separately.

Retention Activity. A specific intervention strategy implemented on behalf of a particular group or groups of students, at least partly to improve the rate of student retention (or return) from that group or groups; for example, learning assistance centers or programs, special required counseling or advising efforts, orientation classes for credit, early "alert" strategies, prewithdrawal interviews, special training for faculty advisers.

Impact on Target Group. The concrete, observable, documented effects of the action program on the group of students for whom it was implemented; for example, greater satisfaction, attendance, performance, participation. Quantify results, if possible.

Impact on Institution. New college policies, procedures, attitudes, behavior of faculty and staff that resulted from the action programs; for example, new registration procedures, new policies regarding deadline for withdrawals, new core requirements for freshmen, new expectations for faculty advising, documented changes in attitudes or perceptions.

Thank you very much for responding to this survey. We know the demand on your time was significant. Please feel free to share with us any general comments you might have on the survey or on the topic of retention.

You will receive a summary report of the results of this study.

Return completed questionnaire to:

WWISR
NCHEMS
Dr. Philip Beal
P.O. Drawer P
Boulder CO 80302

Study Directors

Lee G. Noel, PhD
Regional Director
ACT

Philip E. Beal, PhD
Visiting Scholar
NCHEMS

Retention Activity Report Form

Please type. Use separate form for each program. Please make copies if necessary.

Target Group	Retention Activity
Sophomore undeclared majors. Participation was strongly encouraged.	Special week for individual and group counseling during winter term.

Sample

Impact on Target Group	Impact on Institution
50% decided on major; 30% designed a decision making plan; 10% no results; 10% no show. Of attenders, average rating of help received was 8.9 on a 10-point scale of satisfaction.	Better class section planning in several major disciplines, more faculty-student contact on course offerings; more knowledgeable major decisions and fewer schedule changes in next term. Some faculty complained about the extra work load.

Satisfaction with success of program: Low 1 2 3 (4) 5 High

Please explain: The response of students was excellent (90% participated), the faculty understood student perceptions and problems better, and integration with other services was facilitated (counseling office, career planning, financial aid). In several cases, erroneous information was corrected.

Estimated effectiveness of program in improving retention: Low 1 (2) 3 4 5 High

Please explain: In next year, 75% of the total sophomores returned compared with 71% the year before; 65% of the undeclared major sophomores returned. No comparable data existed on year before. Too early to attribute improvement to the program alone. (85% of the no shows failed to return for the next year.)

May the contents of this form be shared? Yes ___ No ___

Name of person to contact for more information _____

Title _____ Institution _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____
area code

Appendix B

Announcing WHAT WORKS IN STUDENT RETENTION
The Report of a Joint Project of
The American College Testing Program and the
National Center for Higher Education Management Systems

Philip E. Beal
Lee Noel

Available early 1980

1. Introduction

Much research has been done in higher education on the topic of student attrition/retention. The focus of this document is on the next step for most colleges and universities: devising intervention strategies to improve student retention. The information presented is directed toward two-year and four-year schools, public and private. The purpose is to provide functional assistance to college administrators and faculty in their efforts to improve enrollment through retention.

2. Research on Retention—What Does It All Mean?

This section presents in outline fashion what the research literature says to the practicing administrator. The terminology of retention is defined and information is organized and extracted in clear and concise fashion.

3. Action Programs in the Literature

A relatively small amount of research has been done on the effectiveness of action programs for improving student retention. The authors present a brief overview of the reports on these programs.

4. General Findings from WWISR

The results and findings from a national study, What Works in Student Retention (WWISR), are presented in Section 4. Information was collected from over 980 colleges and universities across the country, which provided descriptions of 1,024 action programs designed to improve student retention.

5. Parade Leaders in Improving Student Retention

From WWISR, the specific action programs which showed the most impact on improved student retention and which had the greatest general impact on the campus were selected. Programs considered unique were also selected. These action programs, and the target groups to which they are directed, are described. Selected examples of specific programs are presented.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

In this section, the authors draw conclusions from WWISR, from the literature, and from their experience in helping colleges address the problem of improving student retention. Specific recommendations are offered as to how colleges and universities might address the problems on their own campuses.

What Works in Student Retention will be available for distribution early in 1980. At that time, information about how to purchase a copy may be obtained by writing:

ACT National Center for Educational Conferences
P.O. Box 168
Iowa City, Iowa 52243

or

Publications Department
National Center for Higher Education Management Systems
P.O. Drawer P
Boulder, Colorado 80302